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Weekly luncheon strives to build better community

BY CARRIE HUTCHISON
Asst. News Editor

When he came to America more than 30 years ago, Chaplain T.E. Koshy saw a need to overcome racial and religious barriers.

Koshy sought to unify the Syracuse community when he became a chaplain at Syracuse University.

He created a weekly luncheon at Hendricks Chapel in an effort to bring people of various backgrounds together in a friendly and casual atmosphere.

Koshy, a member of the International Assembly of Hendricks Chapel, sponsors the noon luncheons every Thursday at SU.

Attendees span all races and religions. The event, which caters to about 100 people, attracts its attendees by "word-of-mouth," Koshy said.

At the most recent luncheon March 9, Alex Thevaranjan, an assistant professor in the School of Management, gave a brief speech to the attendees about the purpose of the luncheon.

"Somebody asked me why I come here every Thursday," he said, holding up three small ropes of different colors to represent diversity at SU.

"What saddens me at SU is, here we can have a rich experience, but we tend to circle around our own type," Thevaranjan said, twisting the ropes into circles.

"When I ask my students to form into groups, they often form along racial, ethnic and color lines," he said, tying the ropes together.

"There is only one kind, and that's humankind," he declared and then performed a slight-of-hand uniting the three ropes into one knot to audience applause.

"This group is a step in the right direction," he said. "When we interact, barriers break down. That's what I like about this group — we can build bridges of understanding."

Thevaranjan then introduced the speaker for that week, Gordon Bell, general manager of Motts Hill Network.

Bell spoke of his experiences while traveling in India and reviewed the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

"Ghandi had some very interesting thoughts on life," he said, noting the Indian leader's philosophies on experiences such as early childhood

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learning and the value of a supportive family.

For some in the Syracuse community, the regular attendees of the luncheon have become like a family.

A diverse group comes to share ideas and food as well as listen to speakers, Koshy said, mentioning past guests such as Syracuse Mayor Roy Bernardi and Chancellor Kenneth Shaw.

Koshy and his wife, Indira Koshy, a former physician at SU's health center, began the luncheons in their home in 1966. As it grew, they moved the event to the chapel, where it has continued for more than 10 years.

Koshy and his wife prepare the food served at the lunches in their home along with help from his associates.

Students, SU faculty and area residents said the weekly event enriches their lives and increases their awareness of different cultures.

"You have the opportunity

to meet people you wouldn't ordinarily meet," said Lloyd Haladay, an assistant professor of languages, literature and linguistics, who attends the luncheon regularly.

SU students spoke of friends they met at the weekly events.

Rose Luo, a graduate student in sociology, found out about the luncheon on e-mail and has met many new friends by attending the event.

"We share common problems," she said.

Lee Tang, a graduate student from Taiwan, said he enjoyed the luncheon's atmosphere.

"It's a very friendly luncheon," he said. "When I first came, I loved to be here. I feel the friendship."

Chaplain Koshy said the friendships made at the luncheon are long-lasting.

Amankwa Kwabena, an SU graduate from Ghana, Africa, has been coming to the luncheon for more than six years.

"It's a nice atmosphere," he said. "It's all about love here."